

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15 USIA-15

ACDA-19 IO-13 OMB-01 DRC-01 EUR-25 NIC-01 AID-20 PC-04

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R 142135Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1222
INFO USCINCSO
DIA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 8016

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR C VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN REACTION TO CHILEAN EVENTS

SUMMARY: VENEZUELAN HAVE REACTED TO CHILEAN COUP AND DEATH OF ALLENDE WITH SHOCK AND CONCERN. OPPOSITION IS ATTACKING COPEI FOR LINKAGES WITH CHILEAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WHOM THEY ACCUSE OF DEPOSING ALLENDE ILLEGALLY, AND US IS CATCHING ONLY PARTIAL BLAME. CALDERA IS REACTING DEFENSIVELY TO THIS, AND HAS DENIED ANY ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF COUP. HE ALSO DENIED THAT CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN ARMIES (HELD HERE SEPTEMBER 3-7) HAD ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE. HE ADMITTED COUP CAN HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS OF CONTINENT. LEFTISTS ARE UNITED IN CLAIMING ALLENDE WAS ASSASSINATED.

THERE IS SOME NERVOUSNESS ABOUT IMPRESSION ON LOCAL MILITARY, WHICH SEEMS RELIEVED AT ALLENDE DOWNFALL. DEMONSTRATIONS OVER CHILE HAVE OCCURRED IN CARACAS AND ELSEWHERE, BUT SO FAR THERE IS NO DIRECT THREAT TO AMERICANS. CHILEAN EVENTS INCREASE ISOLATION OF VENEZUELA AS ONE OF LAST TWO WORKING SOUTH AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES. END SUMMARY.

1. VENEZUELAN REACTION TO OVERTHROW AND DEATH OF PRESIDENT ALLENDE
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HAS BEEN, IN GENERAL, ONE OF ANGER, NERVOUSNESS, SHOCK AND CONCERN. FAR LEFT IS PREDICTABLY VIOLENT AND EXTREMELY BITTER IN ITS RAGE AGAINST MILITARY AND "IMPERIALISTS AND RIGHTISTS" WHOM THEY HOLD RESPONSIBLE

FOR COUP. SOME LEFTIST LEADERS SAY CHILEAN COUP PROVES THAT PEACEFUL CHANGE WITHIN ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS IMPOSSIBLE. WHILE US ALSO COMES IN FOR SOME BLAME, LEFT PLACES MOST STRESS ON ROLE OF CHILEAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND LINKAGES WITH LOCAL GOVERNING COPEI PARTY. THESE ATTACKS ON COPEI ARE MAJOR BLOW TO GOVERNMENT PARTY EFFORTS TO FORGE ALLIANCE WITH LEFT AGAINST MAJOR OPPOSITION ACCION DEMOCRATICA.

2. ACCION DEMOCRATICA, WITH NO OVERT LINKAGES TO CHILEAN OPPOSITION, IS EAGERLY JOINING IN CONDEMNATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND PUBLICIZING CONDOLENCE MESSAGE SENT TO ALLENDE FAMILY BY FORMER PRESIDENT ROMULO BETANCOURT. THIS MESSAGE, WHILE DIVORCING ITSELF FROM ALLENDE'S POLICIES, NEVERTHELESS EXPRESSES SYMPATHY FOR LATE PRESIDENT. COPEI, ONLY MAJOR POLITICAL GROUP NOT STRONGLY CONDEMNING OVERTHROW OF UP GOVERNMENT, IS EXPRESSING REGRET AT VIOLENCE, DEATH OF ALLENDE AND LOSS OF LIFE, BUT IS OTHERWISE TRYING TO KEEP HEAD DOWN. BOTH DELEGATED COMMISSION OF CONGRESS AND CARACAS MUNICIPAL

COUNCIL HAVE CONDEMNED COUP. CONGRESS RESOLUTION REFERS TO "OUTSIDE AND ANTI-NATIONAL INTERESTS ALLIED WITH THE MOST RECALCITRANT AND RIGHTIST SECTORS" AS HAVING PARTICIPATED IN ALLENDE'S OVERTHROW.

3. PRESIDENT CALDERA IS ON DEFENSIVE AS TO CHILEAN EVENTS - - HE OPENED REGULAR WEEKLY PRESS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 13 BY STATING THAT, GIVEN CORDIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND CHILE, HE "FELT CONSTRAINED TO EXPRESS PROFOUND CONCERN AND ANGUISH" AT CHILEAN EVENTS. SAID CALDERA, "DESPITE IDEOLOGICAL DISTANCE WHICH SEPARATED US WE MAINTAINED GOOD FRIENDSHIP, AND DURING ALL HIS (ALLENDE'S) GOVERNMENT THERE WAS NO DEED, NO INCIDENT, EVEN REMOTELY NEGATIVE, IN THE HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND CHILE". LATER IN CONFERENCE CALDERA REFUSED TO COMMENT ("STILL PREMATURE") ON QUESTION OF RECOGNITION OF NEW GOVERNMENT.

4. ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT COPEI AND CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN ARMIES KNEW OF COUP IN ADVANCE, CALDERA EMPHATICALLY DENIED THAT HE OR HIS PARTY OR THE CONFERENCE HAD ANY ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE. CALDERA SAID HE HAD ONCE OFFERED TO MEDIATE BETWEEN ALLENDE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION. REFERRING TO STORIES ABOUT VISIT OF CHILEAN SERGIO CONFIDENTIAL

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MOLINA (UN CONSULTANT) LAST MONDAY, CALDERA DENIED HE HAD BROUGHT ANY INFORMATION ABOUT COUP FROM CHILE. HE POINTED OUT THAT CHILE DID NOT SEND REPRESENTATIVE TO CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN ARMIES.

5. ASKED ABOUT EFFECT OF CHILEAN EVENTS ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTINENT, CALDERA SAID IT WILL HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECT. HE SAID PRESIDENT ALLENDE WAS "A POLITICIAN OF GREAT EXPERIENCE AND ... I OBSERVED ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION HIS DESPERATE EFFORTS TO UNIFY THE FORCES WHICH BACKED HIM ... AT THE SAME TIME HE WAS FIGHTING AGAINST THE OPPOSITION ... HE WAS ALSO IN DIFFICULT COMBAT AT THE CENTER OF THE VERY FORCES WHICH HAD GIVEN HIM AN ELECTORAL TRIUMPH AND PARTICIPATED WITH HIM IN THE GOVERNMENT". HE SIDESTEPED QUESTION OF ATTITUDE OF PATRICIO AYLWIN AND RADOMIRO TOMIC TOWARD JUNTA.

6. THERE IS SOME NERVOUSNESS ABOUT COUP'S EXAMPLE FOR VENEZUELAN MILITARY, BUT ALSO REALIZATION THAT LOCAL SITUATION IS SO DIFFERENT FROM CHILE'S THAT TROOPS HERE ARE UNLIKELY TO BE SWAYED TO EMULATE CHILEAN COUNTERPARTS. MILITARY LEADERSHIP APPEARS DISCREETLY RELIEVED TO SEE ALLENDE OVERTHROWN. GOVERNMENT HAS DECREED THREE DAYS' OFFICIAL MOURNING AND IS DEPLOYING SECURITY FORCES WHERE NECESSARY TO PREVENT VIOLENCE. SO FAR DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE FORMED IN CARACAS AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, PLAZA VENEZUELA, CHILEAN EMBASSY AND SCATTERED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (WHICH ARE STILL ON SUMMER VACATION) BUT THEY HAVE BEEN MOSTLY PEACEFUL. THERE ARE ALSO PEACEFUL MANIFESTATIONS

IN OTHER CITIES. AUTHORITIES ARE ALERT TO PROTECT EMBASSY BUT, ASIDE FROM SOME TELEPHONED THREATS AND HINTS OF POSSIBLE TROUBLE FROM FEW REMAINING INSURGENT BANDS, THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF IMMEDIATE DANGER TO AMERICANS.

7. LEFTIST PRESS AND LEADERS ARE IN CONCERT IN CLAIMING MILITARY COUP LEADERS ASSASSINATED ALLENDE, WHILE RESPONSIBLE PRESS IS REPORTING AS OBJECTIVELY AS LIMITED INFORMATION FROM SANTIAGO AND WIRE SERVICE COMMENTARY PERMIT. ONE PAPER HAS HEADLINED STORY BY EFE CORRESPONDENT FROM SANTIAGO THAT ALLENDE MAY HAVE BEEN KILLED BY "GAP" BODYGUARD WHEN HE TRIED TO SURRENDER. INTERESTINGLY, CHILEAN MILITARY ATTACHE COLONEL MARCELO HERNAN BEJARES GONZALEZ, WHO APPARENTLY HAS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF LA MONEDA INTERNAL POLITICS, INDEPENDENTLY TOLD ACTING ARMY ATTACHE THIS IS WHAT PROBABLY HAPPENED. HOWEVER, TWO AD INSIDERS HAVE TOLD EMBOFF THAT THEY BELIEVE ALLENDE DID IN FACT COMMIT SUICIDE, AND THIS APPEARS CONFIDENTIAL

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TO BE AD LINE.

8. ASIDE FROM OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF COOL COMPOSURE, GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP IS CONCERNED OVER POSSIBLE DESTABILIZING EFFECT OF EVENTS IN CHILE. GOVERNMENT, LEFT AND RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION ARE EQUALLY CONCERNED THAT LATEST OVERTHROW OF A CONSTITUTIONALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT IN CHILE BY MILITARY INCREASES ISOLATION OF VENEZUELA AS ONE OF LAST TWO WORKING SOUTH AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 10 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 SEP 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973CARACA08016
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: CARACAS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730963/abqceerk.tel
Line Count: 152
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17 JAN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <17-Jan-2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <12 FEB 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VENEZUELAN REACTION TO CHILEAN EVENTS
TAGS: PFOR, VE
To: STATE INFO USCINCSO
DIA
SANTIAGO
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005